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11 December 1963

Prepared by  
[redacted] at C. Cooper's  
request  
MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Conditions in Long An Province

1. Although the Embassy's report on Long An Province (Saigon 1122) cites some dubious statistics, information from other country team sources leaves no doubt that there has been a sharp deterioration of the security situation in Long An and other provinces near Saigon in recent months.

2. The Viet Cong evidently have made a major effort against the strategic hamlets in Long An which, with two adjoining provinces--Dinh Tuong and Kien Tuong--bore the brunt of the intensified guerrilla offensive in November. A MACV evaluation of the province in mid-November indicated that the strategic hamlet program there had become ineffective by that date, and that the morale of the provincial forces was ebbing.

3. The Viet Cong campaign in Long An Province is facilitated by its location adjacent to a major guerrilla base area (the Dong Thap Muoi "war zone"). Communist forces in the province are relatively strong, having attained a 1:1 numerical ratio with the Government forces. There are about 7,500 troops on each side in the province, including irregulars. Such a parity of forces exists in only two or three other provinces--all in the delta--throughout South Vietnam.

4. Reasons cited in the Saigon message for the failure of the strategic hamlet program in Long An are similar to those which have limited the program's effectiveness throughout the delta region. One of the early warnings of these deficiencies was sounded by [redacted]

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[redacted] The dangers apparently were overlooked, however, because of emphasis at the highest levels in Saigon on quantity rather than quality in the program. As a result, the hamlets were overextended in many delta provinces into areas where they could not be adequately supported by the forces available.

ARMY and DOS review(s) completed.

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5. Similar conditions probably exist in other provinces evaluated in field reports as "critical". These include Kien Tuong, Dinh Tuong, Chuong Thien and An Xuyen provinces in the delta; Tay Ninh, Binh Duong and Phuoc Thanh provinces north of Saigon, and Quang Tin Province in the far north. Although the situation had been deteriorating in many areas since July, this deterioration apparently was accelerated by the resurgence of insurgent activity last month.

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believes if present trends are not checked, the enemy may fairly rapidly get control of most of the countryside except the major towns without much fighting.

6. The US sector advisor in Long An province believes that a major military-civil operation, supported by outside forces, is necessary to restore areas damaged by Viet Cong activity and to regain the initiative in the province. Ambassador Lodge reports that he has discussed the Long An problem with General Don, the Minister of Defense, and received assurances that small unit operations would be started and a program of positive action undertaken by the new province chief. Reversal of the trend, however, will be contingent on a coordinated campaign for the region as a whole based on new concepts derived from the review of the strategic hamlet program now underway in Saigon.

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